

The Significance of Unction in Byzantine Iconography

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How agreeable it would be if the art historian could, with the aid of iconographical documents, resolve problems which baffle those who depend primarily upon literary sources for their studies. Unfortunately, such a triumph is rarely afforded to the art historian. Byzantine artists in particular have not left us a detailed record of contemporary events; their productions tell us more about the ideas current in their lifetime than about what actually happened. This is certainly the case for the rite of unction. We have no pictures of a Byzantine emperor being anointed and no evidence that such pictures ever existed. Consequently the art historian cannot directly help towards a firm answer to the question raised by Donald Nicol in his article: after what date should references in chronicle sources to a Byzantine emperor being consecrated by unction be interpreted in a literal rather than in a figurative or metaphorical sense?¹

Nevertheless he can, I believe, help indirectly. A considerable number of pictures exist in which the rite of unction is either portrayed or implied. The iconographical details, however, do not remain constant. By examining the modifications which the rite of unction underwent in Byzantine iconography it is possible to reach conclusions which are not without importance for the historian of the ceremony. Properly speaking such a discussion of the iconography of unction should be preceded

1. D. M. Nicol, 'Kaisersalbung. The Unction of Emperors in Late Byzantine Coronation Ritual', above pp. 37–52.

by the constitution of an exhaustive repertory of the representations known to us. Unfortunately I cannot offer such a repertory here; it would be too long and cumbersome. I shall discuss only the pictures which are directly or indirectly relevant to the actual practice of the rite of unction, with a view to establishing the significance to be attributed to them. I shall be principally concerned with three moments in the history of the iconography of unction: its introduction into Christian art; its incorporation, in the eleventh century, into the 'imperial' David cycle; its special manifestations in Palaiologan art.

1. *Unction in Early Christian iconography*

The earliest surviving Christian representation of unction is to be found on one of the David plates, discovered in Cyprus and now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.² It bears a stamp by which it may be dated to the reign of Heraclius (613–629/30). As is well known, this plate forms part of a set, which may not be complete, illustrated with scenes from the *Life of David*. There exists, however, a yet earlier Jewish representation of the Unction of David in the synagogue of Dura-Europos (Syria), dated 245/6.³ Common elements may be easily discerned in both these representations, which may mean that they have a common archetype, whether in monumental art or in manuscript illumination.⁴ However, there are also significant differences.

In the Dura-Europos picture, David and his brothers stand in a row, with David placed slightly in front of the other figures. All are of the same height, and the artist has been at some pains to emphasize the family likeness between them. David is only distinguished by his purple tunic and folded arms, while his

2. Erica Cruikshank Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies, VII: 1961), no. 62, p. 186 (with bibliography).

3. C. H. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: The Synagogue* (New Haven, 1956), pp. 164–8, pl. 66; A. Grabar, 'Le thème religieux des fresques de la synagogue de Doura', *L'art de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1968), II, pp. 706–8; III, pl. 166b; J. Gutmann, 'Programmatic Paintings in the Dura Synagogue', *The Dura-Europos Synagogue: A Re-evaluation (1932–1972)* (Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies, IV [Jerusalem, 1973]), pp. 137–54; idem, 'Dura Europos (Die Synagoge)', *Reallexikon für byzantinischen Kunst*, I (Stuttgart, 1966), 1230–40.

4. H. Buchthal, *The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter* (London, 1938), p. 20.

brothers, dressed in rose, brown or white, raise their right hand in a gesture of acclamation. To the extreme left of the scene stands Samuel, taller than the other figures; he extends a horn, slightly inclined with the narrow end downwards, over David's head.

As has long been recognized, Jewish and Christian artists did not create for their specific purposes an entirely new iconography. They adapted analogous themes already extant in Antique art. Sometimes their models came from imperial imagery, but there also existed other models, notably scenes of teaching and initiation. However it is unlikely that a model existed for unction in Greek or Roman art.⁵ The Romans anointed statues, but they did not anoint emperors or pontiffs. On the other hand, unction existed as early as 1500 B.C. in Egypt and Syria, when Manahbiria, king of Egypt, made Takou king of Syria and poured oil on his head.⁶ Possibly the artist at Dura-Europos had an Egyptian or Syrian model available for the actual anointing of David. However, he also interpreted and embellished the scene with details taken from the imperial repertoire: the colour of David's tunic and the gestures of his brothers. The picture occupies a prominent place in the decorative programme of the synagogue, which culminates in this representation of David as the Messianic king.

Can we be certain that Christian, and notably Byzantine, artists attributed the same significance as Jewish artists to this scene of Samuel anointing David in the bosom of his family? André Grabar, indeed, interprets the whole series of David plates as embodying an imperial theme.⁷ We await the full study that Kurt Weitzmann has promised us of the iconographical sources for all the David plates.⁸ However, as far as this

5. *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, ed. C. Daremberg and E. Saglio, IV, 1485: 'Statua'; V, 594: 'Unguentum'; *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie*, II, 1 (Stuttgart, 1920), 1857–8: 'Salben'.

6. H. Lesêtre, 'Onction', *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, IV, 1807, fig. 482 (representation of an Egyptian king anointed by two gods); M. Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges* (Strasbourg, 1924), p. 67.

7. A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* (Strasbourg, 1936; reprinted, Variorum, London, 1971), pp. 96–7.

8. See meanwhile Weitzmann's penetrating study of the theme of two of these plates: 'Prolegomena to a Study of the Cyprus Plates', *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, III (1970), 97–111.

particular scene is concerned, there are grounds for doubting that the unction of David is, as Grabar suggested, to be assimilated to a coronation. First of all, it is quite certain that unction, at that period, did not form part of the Byzantine coronation rite; consequently there was no reason for unction to bring the idea of coronation into the observer's mind. Secondly, the elements taken from imperial imagery in the Dura-Europos painting have been omitted in the David plate, to be replaced by other details which merit a closer examination:



Fig. 1 Samuel anointing David, as represented in the David plate, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Samuel not only anoints David; he also imposes his hand upon his head. Further, David is represented much smaller than his brethren and is dressed, not in imperial purple, but in a shepherd's tunic and buskins.

It seems necessary to reconsider what were the connotations in the Christian mind of the rite of unction. Christians inherited

from Jewish tradition the practice of using the word in both a literal and a figurative sense. Jesus Christ had received a figurative unction, but Christians received both a literal and a figurative unction when they were baptized. Baptism was, in fact, the only ceremony in the Byzantine church which included a rite of unction. When the oil was poured on the neophyte he also received the unction of the Spirit. In his treatise *De resurrectione carnis*, Tertullian wrote: 'Caro ungitur ut anima consecratur . . . Caro manus impositione admultatur, ut et anima Spiritu illuminetur . . .'.⁹ In another treatise, *De baptismo*, he gave a fuller explanation of the significance of unction. I quote the passage in translation:

On coming out of the bath, we receive an unction of holy oil in conformity with ancient discipline. According to this, it was customary to raise a person to the priesthood by an unction of oil poured from a horn; thus Aaron was anointed by Moses. This is the origin of our name 'Christian', which comes from the 'chrism', signifying unction, and, moreover, giving the Lord his name. For us alone the unction flows on to our body, but we profit from it spiritually. . . . Then hands are imposed upon us, while the Holy Spirit is invoked by a blessing.¹⁰

The significance of baptismal unction is further developed by Cyril of Jerusalem in his mystagogical catechesis.¹¹ He compares it with the unction of the Spirit received by Christ at his baptism. He quotes in this context the Davidic *Psalms* 44 (45), 7:

So God, your God has anointed you
Above your fellows with oil, the token of joy.

Later Cyril refers explicitly to Old Testament prefigurations of unction, mentioning Aaron and Solomon by name. He adds that they underwent only figuratively what Christians undergo

9. Tertullian, *De resurrectione carnis*, 8: *MPL*, II, 806.

10. Tertullian, *Traité du baptême*, 7–8: ed. R. F. Refoulé (*Sources chrétiennes*, 35 [Paris, 1952]), pp. 120–3; see also H. Leclercq, 'Onction', *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, XII, 2116–19.

11. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catéchèses mystagogiques*, 3: ed. A. Piédagnel (*Sources chrétiennes*, 126 [Paris, 1966]), pp. 120–33.

in reality, thanks to Christ who underwent an unction of the Holy Spirit.

The reason for this digression into Patristics is, perhaps, already evident to the reader. I am suggesting that the associations raised in the Early Christian mind by David's first unction in the bosom of his family were not with the coronation of a Byzantine emperor but rather with the chrism which a neophyte received on the occasion of his baptism. In other words the rite is one of initiation, in the case of David to his Messianic role, and in the case of the neophyte to the Christian life. It is in this sense that I should explain the peculiar details of the iconography of the David plate.

A certain number of initiation scenes are known to us in which the disciple is represented as much smaller than the master. When a child is learning to walk, or when Bacchus is being led by Silenus, no special explanation is necessary.¹² However this 'schema' was retained in Early Christian art for representing Christ's baptism, in which John is represented as much larger than he.¹³ Possibly this same 'schema' was adopted by the artist for the David plate, although, indeed, it could be considered a literal interpretation of the fact that David was the youngest of Jesse's sons. The imposition by Samuel of his hand may also suggest the use of the same rite in baptism. Imposition of the hands was, indeed, a very widespread rite for blessing a person and calling down the Spirit on him.¹⁴ Nevertheless the coincidence is strong, while, at the same time, the absence of imperial connotations is clear. I suggest, therefore, that unction entered into Byzantine iconography, not as an adaptation of imperial imagery but as a distinctly Christian theme of initiation.

My case is perhaps strengthened by a consideration of the pictures of baptism in three Carolingian manuscripts: the *Bible* of Charles the Bald, the *Stuttgart Psalter* and the *Utrecht Psalter*. In the first manuscript there are three unction scenes: f. 31^v, the

12. Sarcophagus in the Museo Nazionale, Rome. See A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography, A Study of its Origins* (London, 1969), pp. 103–4, 265–6.

13. Among many examples, that in the catacombs of St. Callixtus, Rome: Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, fig. 18.

14. J. Coppens, *L'imposition des mains et les rites connexes* (Wetteren-Paris, 1925), pp. 401–2.

Sons of Aaron, Leviticus 8:12–13 (where, in fact, only the unction of Aaron is mentioned); f. 81^v, Saul, I Kings 9:29; f. 185^v, Solomon, III Kings 1:39. Each scene is embellished by circumstantial details. In the first, Aaron stands to the left of the scene; both he and Moses are taller than the ‘sons’. In the second, Saul’s immense stature is made evident, while soldiers to the left and right acclaim him. In the third, the temple is represented in the background, with Zadok to the left of Solomon and Nathan to the right.¹⁵ In each case, the horn is held in the same manner with the narrow end downwards over the head of the person being anointed.

In the *Stuttgart Psalter*, there are two unction scenes: f. 24, illustrating Psalm 19:6: *Salvum fecit Dominus christum suum*; f. 144, illustrating Psalm 88:20: *Inveni David servum suum, oleo sancto meo unxi eum*.¹⁶ In the first, David, small in stature and dressed in a short tunic, kneels before the prophet Samuel who places a hand on his head while, above, a hand, extended from an aureole, pours oil from a phial. In the second, the person being anointed is naked. The prophet places a hand on his shoulders while, above, a hand extended from an aureole, pours oil from a horn, the wide end downwards. To the right stands a personage holding a napkin.

In the *Utrecht Psalter*, there are four unction scenes: f. 13, illustrating Psalm 22:2: *Impinguasti in oleo caput meum*; f. 51^v, again illustrating Psalm 88:20; f. 75^v illustrating Psalm 132:2: *Sicut unguentum in capite, quod descendit in barbam, barbam Aaron*; f. 91^v, illustrating the apocryphal Psalm 151 recounting

15. J. O. Westwood, *The Bible of the Monastery of Saint Paul near Rome* (London, 1876); H. Leclercq, ‘Charles le Chauve (Manuscripts de)’, *Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, III, 856–65. My remarks are based on the set of photographs kindly put at my disposal by Suzy Dufrenne.

16. E. De Wald, *The Stuttgart Psalter* (Princeton, 1930); *Der Stuttgarter Bilderpsalter, Bilb. fol. 23 Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart*, I. Facsimile-Band (Stuttgart, 1965); II: *Untersuchungen* (Stuttgart, 1968), pp. 75, 119–20, 169. It should be remarked in passing that the drawing of the unction of David in Leningrad Q, v. xiv no. 1, f. 1, contrary to the opinion of O. Kurz, ‘Ein insulares Musterbuchblatt und die byzantinische Psalterillustration’, *BNJ*, XIV (1938), 84–93, is unlikely to be a copy after a Byzantine original of this period for two reasons: David and Samuel are given the same stature, and oil is poured from the wide end of the horn. The drawing is consequently closer to known Western representations.

the *Life of David*.¹⁷ In every case the oil is poured by an angel from the wide end of a horn; thus the unction is interpreted figuratively as an infusion of the Spirit of God. On the other hand each unction figures in the narrative series illustrating the Psalm in question. For the first, the personage is seated fully clothed, thus following literally the text of the Psalm. The second scene resembles that which illustrates the same Psalm in the *Stuttgart Psalter*, in that the anointed person is naked. For the third scene, a hand blesses from the sky, while Aaron is acclaimed by his sons standing to left and right. In the fourth miniature David is represented in a tunic with his flock of sheep.

There is a clear difference between the scenes in the *Bible of Charles the Bald* and those in the two Psalters. These are representations of historical events, using iconographical details deriving ultimately from imperial ceremonial. They do not include David's unction in the bosom of his family, a scene which is, apparently, absent from the Carolingian repertoire. However, even here, the unction of the sons of Aaron may reflect details of Christian sacramental rites. We have seen that the Fathers interpreted this event as a type of baptism; it may also reflect ordination rites.¹⁸ In the *Sacramentary* of Gellone, dating from the eighth century, it is prescribed that a bishop should be anointed on his head. By the ninth century it had become the practice in the West to anoint priests too, albeit on the hands. This practice was justified by reference to the unction of Aaron.

On the other hand, the Psalters, whose miniatures at once illustrate and interpret the Psalm, may well contain allusions to baptism. The figurative sense given to unction by the presence of angels is in accordance with the general character of the illustrations of the *Utrecht Psalter*, which particularly insists upon active intervention by the angels of God in his creation. Angels, for example, are present, holding napkins, in the scene of the infant Christ's first bath, illustrating Psalm 86 (f. 50^v). Equally it

17. E. De Wald, *Illustrations of the Utrecht Psalter* (Princeton, 1932), pp. 13–14, pl. xx; p. 40, pl. lxxxviii; p. 58, pl. cxvi; p. 72, pl. cxliv. Suzy Dufrenne, *Les illustrations du Psautier d'Utrecht* (in course of publication; thesis in typescript, Paris, 1972), I, p. 129; II, pp. 445–7.

18. H. Leclercq, 'Onction dans l'ordination', *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, XII, 2143–6.

is important to recall that, in Patristic thinking, a sacramental rite was the means by which Christ's action continued in his Church. However, for us, the concrete details are the most significant: the nudity of the person being anointed, the presence of figures holding napkins and the gesture of imposing a hand. Is a more plausible explanation of these possible than that they assimilate the unctions of the Old Testament to Christian sacraments and notably to that of baptism?

II. *The Unction of David as an imperial theme*

Although there may well have existed other pictures of unction in lost Byzantine manuscripts, analogous to those in the *Bible* of Charles the Bald, all the extant miniatures which are earlier than the eleventh century portray uniquely David's first unction in the bosom of his family. An iconographical type is established by the tenth century which may have slight variations of detail, the presence, for example, of a personification of Mildness or of Jesse's wife.¹⁹ Further, an abridged form of the iconographical type existed, at least as early as the ninth century, in which Samuel and David figure alone. There is a remarkable example of this variant in the *Pantocrator Psalter*, Athos *Pantocrator* 61, f. 125, in which Samuel is 'illuminated' in his choice by a ray of light and a hand issuing from a halo.²⁰ In all these variants one important detail does not change: David is represented small in stature and dressed as a shepherd boy.

It is possible that the original association with baptism was lost or forgotten in the period after Iconoclasm. At least, the detail of Samuel imposing his hand is not perpetuated. Further, in the miniature illustrating the Homily *De Deo* of Gregory of Nazianzus in the ninth-century *Paris. graec.* 510, f. 174^v, the Unction of David appears as a type of Christ.²¹ Sirarpie Der

19. Buchthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–21, fig. 3; Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *L'illustration des Psautiers grecs du Moyen Age*, II: *Londres Add.* 19.352 (Paris, 1970), p. 100, n. 4 (giving a considerable list of variants).

20. Suzy Dufrenne, *L'illustration des Psautiers grecs du Moyen Age*, I (Paris, 1966), p. 32, pl. 19.

21. Sirarpie Der Nersessian, 'The Illustrations of the Homilies of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Paris. Gr. 510. A study of the Connection between Text and Images', *DOP*, XVI (1962), 203–4, pl. 4.

Nersessian has pointed out that the other miniatures on this folio have as their subjects two other Old Testament types of Christ: Isaac sacrificed by his father Abraham and Jacob wrestling with an angel. The only allusion to unction in this homily concerns Jacob anointing the pillar, which was the Rock anointed for our sake. The artist has substituted for the unction of the pillar the unction of David.

The Unction of David in the *Leo Bible*, which dates from the middle of the tenth century, is also interpreted as a type of Christ (*Vatican. regin. graec. 1, f. 263*).²² This is made clear by the epigraphs, which explain this event as foreshadowing Christ (the anointed one) as God. Here again, although the epigraphs also allude to David being anointed to the *imperium*, there does not seem to be an assimilation of David's first unction to an accession rite. Indeed it was considered necessary to introduce another scene into the David cycle to symbolize his *imperium*, that in which David is elevated on a shield.²³ This iconographical type was certainly inspired by imperial ceremonial, since the rite in question did not exist among the Jews.

David could have been represented as a type of the Byzantine emperor as soon as Constantinople was identified with the New Jerusalem, in other words as early as the fifth century, when Marcian was hailed by the Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon as the New David.²⁴ Tarasios, patriarch of Constantinople at the time of the Second Council of Nicaea, made the same assimilation.²⁵ However, in iconography, it is necessary to wait until the beginning of the eleventh century for a clear example of this assimilation, when Basil II has his Psalter illustrated with a full-page representation of his triumph over his enemies and

22. *Miniature della Bibbia Cod. vat. regin. greco 1 e del Salterio Cod. vat. palat. greco 381* (Milan, 1905), p. 9, pl. 12; C. Mango, 'The date of Cod. Vat. Reg. Gr. 1 and the "Macedonian Renaissance"', *Inst. Romanum Norvegiae, Acta ad archaeol. et artium pertinentia*, IV (Rome, 1969), 121–6.

23. Ch. Walter, 'Raising on a shield in Byzantine iconography', *REB*, XXXIII (1975), 146–7.

24. E. Schwartz, *Acta conciliorum*, II, i, 2, p. 155¹³; II, ii, 2, p. 9⁹; Ch. Walter, *L'iconographie des conciles dans la tradition byzantine* (Paris, 1970), p. 139.

25. J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, XIII, 408 (= *MPG*, XCVIII, 1436).

another page of scenes from the Life of David, including that of the first unction.²⁶

If the assimilation of the Byzantine emperor to David is now explicit, it is not yet clear that unction was associated in the Byzantine mind with accession to the throne. That there was room for ambiguity in the use of the word unction is evident both in Byzantine and in Old Testament texts, as we have noted. To this day exegetes do not seem to be in agreement as to the exact import of the rite of unction for Old Testament kings, prophets and priests.²⁷ Fundamentally unction consecrated a person rendering him inviolable, such that the man who laid hands upon him committed a sacrilege. In the case of prophets this unction was, except perhaps for Elisha, invariably figurative. For kings there were, however, two sorts of unction: secret and public. Saul was anointed twice, according to the Septuagint, once secretly and once publicly when he was acclaimed king. Solomon was anointed once, publicly. David was anointed three times, once secretly and twice publicly, on becoming king of Judah and of Israel respectively.

It is in the eleventh century that we find these unctions first represented in Byzantine art. One of the miniatures occurs in a Psalter, *Vatican. graec.* 752, f. 82, which is dated by its Easter tables to 1059.²⁸ It illustrates Psalm 26, which, according to Theodoret of Cyr's *Commentary*, refers to David's acclamation as king of Judah (II Kings 2:4).²⁹ In fact there is an epigraph referring the miniature to David's unction as king of Israel (II Kings 5:3). It is therefore clear that the artist's deliberate intention was to represent not David's unction in the bosom of his family but the rite marking David's accession to power. In order to drive his point home, he combines the rite of unction

26. V. Lazarev, *Storia della pittura bizantina* (Turin, 1967), p. 141, pl. 128.

27. H. Lesêtre, op. cit., 1805–81, says that 'une onction royale était exceptionnelle, soit pour établir une nouvelle dynastie . . . soit pour quelqu'un dont le pouvoir était contestable'. E. Cothenet, 'Onction', *Dictionnaire de la Bible (Supplément)*, VI (Paris, 1960), 717, says that 'on peut conclure avec certitude que . . . l'onction constituait l'un des actes essentiels de l'intronisation du nouveau roi'.

28. E. De Wald, *The Illustrations in the Manuscripts of the Septuagint*, III: *Psalms and Odes*, 2: *Vaticanus graecus 752* (Princeton, 1942), p. 16; Walter, op. cit. (n. 23), 153–4.

29. Theodoret of Cyr, *Interpretatio in Psalmis*: MPG, LXXX, 1048D–1049C.

with that of elevation on a shield, and dresses David in imperial clothes.

In the eleventh-century *Book of Kings*, *Vatican. graec.* 333, there are representations of three Old Testament kings being anointed. For David there is only the standard scene of his first secret unction (f. 22^v).³⁰ Both of Saul's unctions are illustrated.

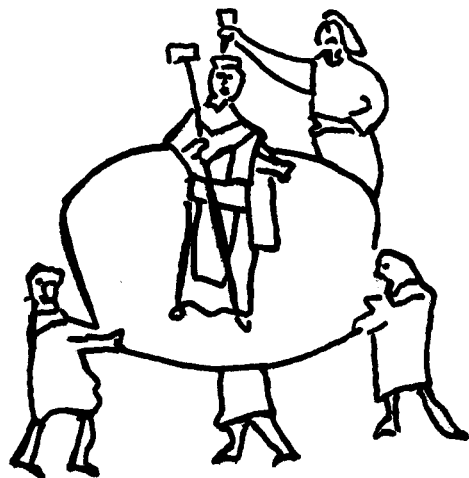


Fig. 2 David's unction as King of Israel, as represented in the Psalter, *Vatican. graec.* 752, f. 82.

For the first secret unction (f. 14^v, I Kings 10:1), Saul is not imperially dressed.³¹ On the other hand, for his second unction when he is acclaimed king, the artist has used the same iconography as was used for David in *Vatican. graec.* 752; Saul is raised on a shield as well as being anointed and he is imperially dressed (f. 15^v, I Kings 11:15).³² For Solomon's unction (f. 71^v, III Kings 1:39), the artist has closely followed the text, and Solomon is imperially dressed.³³

30. J. Lassus, *L'illustration du Livre des Rois* (Paris, 1973), p. 51, fig. 40.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 44, fig. 24.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 44, fig. 25.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 79, fig. 97. In this miniature the oil gushes from the top of the horn held by Zadok. This detail comes from an apocryphal account of David's first unction, according to which, when Samuel approached David, the oil at

Here we have examples of a new development in the iconography of unction. In historical scenes, Old Testament kings are represented, when anointed on the occasion of their accession to power, in imperial dress. Another manuscript, the *Theodore Psalter*, London, B.M. Add. 19352, dated 1066, adds an ideological complement to these historical scenes. It contains no less than six presentations of the unction of David.³⁴ In four cases the miniature portrays either the full or the abridged version of David's unction in the bosom of his family. In each case David is represented small and dressed in shepherd's clothing. However, on f. 19 and f. 97^v, the iconography undergoes a notable modification. The first miniature illustrates Psalm 17:51 (God . . . deals mercifully with David his anointed), and the second Psalm 74:10 (comparing the horn of the just with that of the unjust man). In each of these pictures of his unction, David is given adult stature, and he is dressed as a Byzantine emperor.³⁵

What conclusions can we draw from this new development, which occurred, apparently, about the middle of the eleventh century? The context of the miniatures of the *Theodore Psalter*, which serve an ideological rather than a historical purpose, suggests that the assimilation of David to a Byzantine emperor has been made on a figurative level: both have been called to the service of God. This would be in accordance with what we can learn from literary sources. David is still, a century later, for the Didaskalos of the Psalter, George Tornikes, primarily the forerunner of Christ.³⁶ So we learn from a discourse pronounced in 1146. However, three years earlier, in 1143, another Didaskalos, Michael Italikos, established a parallel between the unction of David by Samuel and that of Manuel Komnenos by the patriarch.³⁷ In the context it seems that

once gushed from his horn. For an example in the iconography of David's first unction, see the *Barberini Psalter*, Vatican. barb. graec. 372, f. 152^v: R. Stichel, 'Ausserkanonische Elemente in byzantinischen Illustrationen des Alten Testaments', *Römische Quartalschrift*, LXIX (1974), 169–70, fig. 7b.

34. Der Nersessian, op. cit. (n. 19), figs. 33, 159, 174, 196, 297, 298.

35. Ibid., figs. 33, 159.

36. *Georges et Démétrios Tornikès, Lettres et discours*, ed. J. Darrouzès (Paris, 1970), pp. 82 l. 24–83 l. 2.

37. *Michel Italikos, Lettres et discours*, ed. P. Gautier (Paris, 1972), pp. 79, 292.

Italikos is using the word unction figuratively; he is comparing their divine vocations, not the rites by which the respective monarchs came to power.

On the other hand the historical pictures, in which unction is combined with raising on a shield, show that Byzantine artists were aware that unction was also an accession rite. We cannot be sure that emperors were in fact raised on a shield in the eleventh century; however, there is no doubt as to the significance of this rite in iconography.³⁸ It definitely marked an accession to power. Doubling the two rites in a miniature, as they were certainly never doubled in reality, may be, technically speaking, a 'conflation'. It also serves to define unction in this context as being an accession rite and not just a symbol of divine favour.

These miniatures are to be associated with others in which the Old Testament kings, notably David and Solomon, are presented as the paragons of the Byzantine emperors. In these pictures coronation, unction and raising on a shield may appear separately or combined. A historical personage, an angel, or Christ himself, may anoint or crown. Since, however, as we have said, no picture exists of a Byzantine emperor being anointed, whether by a human or a divine personage, we cannot conclude from these pictures that the rite of unction had already been introduced into the coronation ceremonial as early as 1059, when the first dated miniature of an imperial unction was executed. The most we can say is that by the middle of the eleventh century, it was accepted that a rite of unction could mark an accession to power.

III. *Unction in Palaiologan art*

So far as can be gathered from extant representations of the rite in Byzantine miniatures, the iconography of unction undergoes no new development in the course of the twelfth century. The pictures which we must next consider date from the thirteenth century, when it is certain that the rite was already in use. We shall be concerned principally with the sense attributed by these pictures to the rite of unction. Before examining them, however, it may be useful to ask what were the advantages attributed to unction as a coronation rite, first by Western authors and then

38. Walter, *op. cit.* (n. 23), 133, 173.

by two Byzantine canonists, Theodore Balsamon and Demetrios Chomatianos.

When Pippin the Short was anointed in 752, it was in order to legitimize his usurpation.³⁹ 'By unction', he said, 'Divine Providence has raised us to the throne.'

Thus he attributed a sacramental value to the rite analogous to that of baptismal unction. The physical rite acquired for the emperor a figurative unction; he received God's favour *ex opere operato*. The analogy was so close that later the tenth-century chronicler Flodoard was to attribute to the unction which Clovis received as a catechumen the same value as a royal unction.⁴⁰

From being a means of legitimizing a usurpation, unction rapidly became a regular part of the imperial coronation ceremonial in the West. In 816 Louis the Pious was anointed and crowned emperor by Pope Stephen IV at Rheims. Later the rite was assimilated to the consecration of a bishop in western medieval rituals, but already in the prayer recited at the coronation of Charles the Bald the sacerdotal value of unction was explicit; the emperor was assimilated to Old Testament priests and kings:

Coronet te Dominus corona gloriae . . . et ungat te in regis
regimine oleo gratiae Spiritus sancti, unde unxit sacerdotes,
reges, prophetas et martyres . . .⁴¹

If Byzantine emperors did not hasten to emulate this performance, it was, perhaps, because they did not at once discern any advantages. Inviolability, a secondary but important consequence of unction, was acquired by another rite. Constantine Porphyrogenitus recounts that, eight days after his birth, a prince born to the purple was tonsured; on this occasion a prayer was recited asking God to protect the newborn babe throughout his life.⁴² Further, the rite, in the West, invited clerical apologists, such as Hincmar, to maintain

39. Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges*, p. 69.

40. B. Basse, *La constitution de l'ancienne France* (Paris, 1973), p. 90.

41. Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 73 n. 1.

42. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De cerimoniis*, II, 23: pp. 620–2 (CSHB); L. Bréhier, '“Hiereus” et “Basileus”', *Mélanges L. Petit* (Bucharest, 1948), pp. 42–3.

that he who anoints is superior to him who is anointed.⁴³ John Chrysostom had, indeed, hinted long before that Old Testament kings submitted to spiritual authority when they inclined their heads to receive the unction.⁴⁴ However, this line of thinking hardly appealed to the Byzantine spirit.

Perhaps Byzantine emperors were ignorant as to the exact way in which unction was performed in the West. On the erroneous testimony of Theophanes, it had long been thought that Charlemagne stripped naked on the occasion of his coronation by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day 800, and that the Pope drenched him in oil from head to toe.⁴⁵ Constantine Manasses recounted this story anew in the twelfth century, adding, however, in mitigation, that thus had been anointed the Old Testament kings.⁴⁶

When Byzantine canonists speak of unction, it is because they attribute to it effects analogous to those which result from sacraments. Thus Theodore Balsamon, commenting the 12th canon of the Council of Ancyra, which is concerned with the remission of sins by baptism, attributes, in a specific case, the remission of an emperor's crime by the unction of coronation.⁴⁷ He is referring to the (supposed) unction of John Tzimiskes, who was thereby absolved from the crime of murdering his predecessor Nikephoros Phokas. By the same argument, he attributes a remission of sins to bishops when, at their consecration (in the Byzantine rite), a Gospel Book is placed on their heads.

43. Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

44. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Isaiah*, 6: MPG, LVI, 125.

45. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883-5), I, pp. 472 l. 30-473 l. 4. The account of the *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, II, p. 7, which makes no allusion to an unction, must be preferred. As Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 464, plausibly suggests, Theophanes was misled by the fact that Charles, the son of Charlemagne, was anointed by the pope the same day. Cf. *Liber Pontificalis*, p. 7. For the most recent discussion of Charlemagne's imperial coronation, see P. Klassen, 'Karl der Grosse, der Papsttum und Byzanz', *Karl der Grosse*, I, ed. H. Beumann (Düsseldorf, 1965), pp. 584-5, 595-6, and C. N. Tsirpanlis, 'Byzantine Reactions to the Coronation of Charlemagne', *Byzantina*, VI (1974), 345-60.

46. Constantine Manasses, *Compendium Chronicum (CSHB)*, p. 193, vv. 4516-18. Unfortunately the illuminated Bulgarian version of the chronicle, *Vatican. slav.* 2, contains no miniature of Charlemagne's supposed unction.

47. *Canones: MPG*, CXXXVII, 1156. Cf. Nicol, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

The assimilation of an emperor to a bishop is more explicit in the justification provided by Demetrios Chomatianos of emperors translating bishops from one see to another, contrary to the dictates of canon law.⁴⁸ The emperor, he writes, is the successor of the Supreme Pontiffs of Antiquity; hence his role in religious affairs. However, under the new dispensation, these powers have been enhanced. By reason of his imperial chrism, the emperor is entitled to be called the anointed of the Lord. Christ our God is also our high priest. The emperor, being anointed, also receives the charisms appropriate to a high priest.

It is true that Louis Bréhier maintained that the emperor was not to be assimilated at Byzantium to a priest.⁴⁹ 'Tous les efforts', he wrote, 'entrepris pour reconnaître aux empereurs un caractère sacerdotal semblent vains.'

Nevertheless it has become clearer in recent years that, towards the end of the Byzantine epoch, emperors insisted more, rather than less, on their spiritual prerogatives.⁵⁰ This insistency is already manifest with the first Komneni, that is to say at the time when the first dated pictures of an 'imperial' unction were executed. *Vatican. graec.* 752 was finished in 1059, the year in which Isaac Komnenos abdicated to take the habit of a Studite monk.⁵¹ Seven years later the *Theodore Psalter* was illuminated in the monastery to which the emperor had retired. In 1094 Alexios Komnenos was to promulgate his celebrated *prostagma* on the reform of the clergy.⁵² In 1156 Manuel I convoked his first synod. The practice of emperors presiding at the doctrinal debates of their clergy was to continue under the Palaiologi.⁵³ It would be tempting to suppose that Byzantine

48. Demetrios Chomatianos, *Ad Constantinum Cabasilam, Responsum*, 4: ed. J. B. Pitra, *Analecta Sacra et Classica*, VI (Paris and Rome, 1891), col. 631 (=MPG, CXIX, 949). See also J. Darrouzès, 'Les réponses canoniques de Jean de Kitros', *REB*, XXXI (1973), 323-4.

49. Bréhier, op. cit., p. 45.

50. V. Laurent, 'Le rituel de l'investiture du patriarche byzantin', *Bulletin de la section historique de l'Académie roumaine*, XXVIII (1947), 231; idem, 'Le trisépiscopat du patriarche Matthieu I^{er}', *REB*, XXX (1972), 16. The subject merits re-examination.

51. G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (Oxford, 1968), p. 341.

52. J. Darrouzès, *Recherches sur les Offikia de l'église byzantine* (Paris, 1970), pp. 51-8; P. Gautier, 'L'édit d'Alexis Comnène sur la réforme du clergé', *REB*, XXXI (1973), 165-201.

53. Walter, *L'iconographie des conciles*, pp. 143-4.

emperors adopted the rite of unction as a means of confirming them in their spiritual role.

Unfortunately, the three monumental pictures which I now propose to examine suggest that unction was introduced rather as a means of legitimising or strengthening a claim to rule. The first two pictures are dedication portraits, the earlier of which is now known only from a copy made in the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ We shall therefore first consider the later portrait. It represents the Serbian king Marko; it is at the south entrance to the monastery which he constructed near Sušica (Macedonia) about the year 1372.⁵⁵ Marko is represented beside Saint Demetrios, the warrior saint to whom the monastery is dedicated. In his right hand he holds a horn. The earlier portrait was of the Grand Komnenos Manuel I (1238–1263), and it was placed in the church of Saint Sophia, which he founded at Trebizond. He had upon his costume a portrait of another warrior saint, St. George. In his hand he held a long, narrow triangular object, the nature of which is not immediately evident in Prince Gagarin's copy. However, the comparison with Marko's portrait makes it clear that the Grand Komnenos also holds a horn.

In later Byzantine art, when it becomes usual to represent saints with an attribute, Samuel sometimes holds a horn. However, the earliest example known to me of Samuel with a horn is in the church of St. Nicolas at Prilep (Macedonia), which was reconstructed about 1307.⁵⁶ Manuel I's portrait was executed at least half a century earlier. It can only signify that he considered himself to be the anointed of the Lord. So far as I know, we have no evidence in the written sources as to Manuel I having actually been anointed ruler of Trebizond. However, he came to power at a time when former Byzantine territory was divided into many smaller states; titles to rule were at a premium. It therefore seems that we must interpret both these pictures as promulgating the legitimacy of the authority

54. *The Church of Haghia Sophia at Trebizond*, ed. D. Talbot Rice (Edinburgh, 1968), pp. 2, 116, fig. 79.

55. V. Djurić, 'Tri događaja u srpskoj državi XIV veka i njihov odjek u slikarstvu', *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti*, IV (1968), 87–97, fig. 17.

56. G. Millet and A. Frolov, *La peinture du Moyen Age en Yougoslavie*, III (Paris, 1962), fig. 21, i.



Fig. 3 The Grand Komnenos, Manuel I, as represented by his portrait (now surviving only in a nineteenth-century copy) originally placed in the church of Saint Sophia at Trebizond.

exercised by these kings; the legitimacy of their title derived from the providential mission conferred by unction.

In our final example, the sense of the picture is more explicit, although, in this case, the person anointed is an Old Testament king. This last picture is in the monastery of the Dormition at Morača (Montenegro); it is dated 1252.⁵⁷ It illustrates the passage in III Kings 19:15–16, in which Elijah is despatched to anoint two kings and his successor Elisha. Hazael, king of Aram, stands before Elijah, his head slightly inclined and holding out his hands in a prayer gesture. In his left hand Elijah holds a small vase, while, in his right hand, he holds a narrow pen-like instrument, with which he touches Hazael's head. This differs considerably from the cumbrous horn which prophets

57. N. Okunev, 'Monast'ir' Morača v Cernogorii', *BS*, VIII (1939–46), 119–20; Anika Skovan-Vikčević, 'Freske XIII veka u manastiru Morači', *Zbornik radova Viz. Inst.*, V (1958), 161; V. Djurić, 'Jedna slikarska radionica u Srbiji XIII veka', *Starinar*, XII (1961), 68; Gordana Babić, *Les chapelles annexes des églises byzantines* (Paris, 1969), p. 134, figs. 96, 97.

invariably hold in all earlier representations of unction; no doubt the artist has imitated the vase and instrument used in his own time for applying chrism.

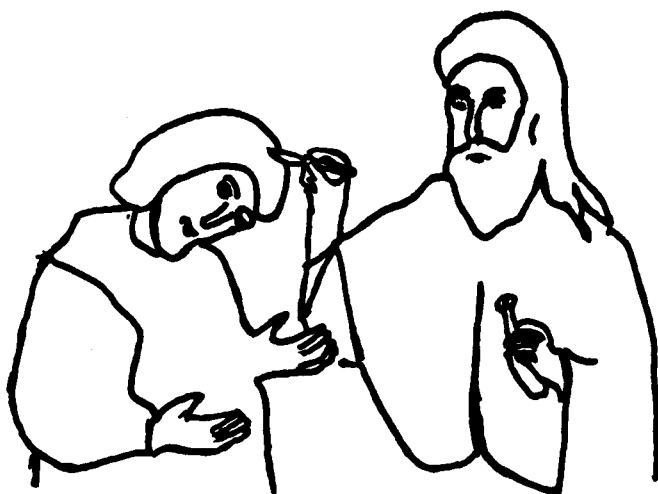


Fig. 4 Elijah anoints Hazael king of Syria, as represented in a picture at the monastery of the Dormition, Morača.

An epigraph in Slavonic gives the title of the scene, while, above, there is a bust of Christ emerging from a nimbus; in his right hand Christ holds a crown. This detail is taken from the official portraiture of Byzantine, Serbian and Bulgarian rulers, in which the source of their authority is made manifest by Christ extending a crown towards them, despatching it by the intermediary of an angel, or actually placing it himself on their head.⁵⁸ The artist has, therefore, interpreted the text of the *Book of Kings* according to contemporary practice in iconography. Also, by doubling the rite of unction with coronation, he has made perfectly clear that he understood unction as conferring a title to rule.

58. I discussed this theme in my paper, 'The iconographical sources for the coronation of Milutin and Simonida at Gračanica', delivered at the Symposium on *L'art byzantin au commencement du XIV^e siècle* at Belgrade, October 1973 (in course of publication).

IV. Conclusion

Since the theme of unction in Byzantine art has not hitherto, so far as I am aware, been subjected to a close examination, the conclusions which I present here are necessarily tentative.

From the seventh till the tenth century inclusive, it seems that the first unction of David in the bosom of his family was the only one to be represented in Byzantine art. Whereas for Jewish artists this event had marked the advent of the Messianic king, for Christians it marked rather the initiation of David to the service of the Lord. Since the only rite of unction in use in the Byzantine church was in the ceremony of baptism, it was natural that, when representing David's first unction, artists should be influenced by this rite. The association of Old Testament unctions with Christian baptism seems also to exist in Carolingian manuscript illustration.

The unction of David was also for Christians an antetype of the figurative unction of Christ. As such the scene appears in ninth- and tenth-century miniatures. Although David was considered to be the paragon of Byzantine emperors at least as early as the fifth century, it does not seem that the imperial state was explicitly associated with unction in the representation of David or other Old Testament kings earlier than the eleventh century. From the middle of that century we have dated examples of Old Testament kings being anointed on acceding to the throne, as well as figurative representations of unction, in which, for example, David, imperially dressed, is anointed by an angel. These pictures form part of a series of imperial images.

During the twelfth century there is no reflection in Byzantine iconography of the reception of an unction rite into coronation ceremonial. The literary sources suggest two motives for the adoption of an unction rite: to legitimise a claim to rule, or to justify the emperor's spiritual prerogatives. The iconographical documents dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are favourable to the former rather than to the latter motive.

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